

12. FIRST REPORT OF MASKED BOOBY, *SULA DACTYLATRA*
FROM THE SHORES OF COASTAL KARNATAKA

(With a photograph)

On a quiet morning on July 1, 1985 at Katapadi, near Udupi (c. 13°23'N., 74°45'E), after a heavy rainfall the previous evening, the barking of dogs drew the attention of the local people to a strange bird. The bird was a rare one to our coast, a masked booby (*Sula dactylatra*).

Masked boobies are common throughout tropical oceans. Records show that there are colonies breeding in Cocos-Keeling, Barbados, Mauritius, Aldabra and in Maldives. They do not go far off from the oceanic land habitats, and hence are rarely to be seen on the coasts of mainland. Infact in India,



Photo. 1. Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*) caught at Mattu near Udupi on 1st July, 1985. (Photo: K. S. Harshvardhan Bhat).

it is said that there are hardly 4-5 reports so far on the occurrence of masked boobies on the west coast.

Ever since the report of the booby's arrival on July 1, 1985 appeared in newspapers, four more such boobies were spotted in different parts of coastal Karnataka within a range of 70 km. On July 3, a second booby was spotted at Trasi, 40 km north of Udupi but it was dead within two days of its arrival. At Panambur, about 35 km south of Udupi two more masked boobies were spotted during the second week of July, 1985, but could not be observed in detail as one had already disappeared (!) and the other was dead the very next day. On July 16, 1985, the fifth masked booby was found at Saligrama, 15 km north of Udupi. It was active but was too weak. The man who brought the bird said that a sum of rupees one hundred was offered for this bird for its exotic nature and delicacy. His refusal to sell it for money is appreciated.

Masked booby spotted at Katapadi was maintained for about two months by a fisherman, feeding it regularly with freshly caught fish. Mr S. A. Hussain of the Bombay Natural History Society helped us to ring this bird (ring No. K-421) and advised some flight

exercises. In about two months the bird became healthy and active. In the meantime, the bird caught at Saligrama was also kept with the previous one and was also ringed (K-422).

Both the boobies were let off from Coconut Island, the northernmost island in the group of islands known as St. Mary's Islands, during October 1985. The birds took to wing happily and went out of sight. However, the bird carrying ring K-422 was found on the shore of Malpe near Udupi, and in a couple of days it died.

The unusual appearance of the boobies along the 70 km of west coast of Karnataka, almost simultaneously, posed a number of questions. Was there a large flock of boobies that moved along the west coast during July this year? If so, what prompted them to do so? Interestingly, all the birds that were spotted, were too weak and could not take to wing on their own. This might mean that only the exhausted and weak ones must have stayed while the rest must have moved away. But where? Or, was there any cyclonic or other turbulence in the Indian ocean or the Arabian Sea which drove some of these birds ashore? Could it also mean that some of them had lost their way and landed on our shore?

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13. THE GOSHAWK, *ACCIPITER GENTILIS* (LINNE) IN POONA, MAHARASHTRA

Southwest of Poona city is the National Defence Academy at Khadakwasala. The approach road to this passes over moderately sloping hills covered with bushes and trees. Close to the establishment, the vegetation turns

into a dry deciduous type of forest that is protected as a sanctuary.

On October 18, 1981, we saw a large hawk dive steeply and land on a leafless tree on the top of a hill some distance away from the